

# Hither & Thither

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## Violence in the Workplace

*By Gary W. Helmer*

Jim had worked for Such and Such Corporation for nearly 30 years and had only recently retired. He had started his career with the company in the distribution center and ultimately became a district manager. A loyal employee, his tenure was relatively uneventful and he was supportive of the company's products and services – proud of his time there.

After retiring, Jim began to have medical problems. Little annoying things at first, but as time went by, his afflictions worsened and he was spending more and more time seeing doctors. Thankfully, he had medical insurance that was

paying most of his medical bills. Soon however, as the bills began piling up, the company started getting later and later with their obligations until one day the payments stopped.

Jim called the company to inquire as to why his bills were no longer being funded and was told that his health plan coverage had expired. Upset, Jim went through his personal files and discovered his original health care plan. Armed with this document he headed for the company's local administrative office. He was sure that this glitch would soon be cleared up and he could concentrate on getting well.

The health plan administrator greeted Jim and promptly informed him that over the years the plan had been modified to accommodate the corporation's "new" business plan. In short, Jim's once comprehensive health care plan had been reduced in coverage significantly, and he was now responsible for making up the difference.

Needless to say, Jim was devastated with this news. His life savings were insufficient to support his rising medical costs. Distraught, he was at a loss as to what to do next.

It was a Tuesday morning when the security guard noticed Jim entering the building. The guard recognized him from his earlier visit and politely said "good morning." Jim nodded in response but he did not speak. His next move surprised everyone. Jim pulled out a pistol and started firing indiscriminately at whatever moved. Quickly

everyone ducked for cover as Jim reloaded the gun for another volley of shots. In a panic, people were running and screaming until finally the shooting stopped. The guard, with the aid of another employee, had subdued Jim and managed to get the gun away from him.

Thankfully, no one had been killed but two people were wounded. They spent several days in the hospital and many months in therapy as a result.

Jim was arrested and sent to a hospital for evaluation. He ultimately stood trial and was sentenced to prison where he died shortly thereafter.

How could this seemingly reputable employee commit such an act of violence? How could he take out his revenge on innocent people over his anger and resentment toward the company's fiscal policies? We will never know for sure just what pushed him over the edge, but apparently Jim had had enough.

Workplace violence is the leading cause of work-related death amid women and the second-leading cause among men. Each year, one in four employees are attacked, threatened, or harassed while on the job. The Department of Justice has proclaimed the workplace as the most dangerous place to be in the United States.

## Definitions

Workplace violence is any violent act, behavior, or threat that occurs in the workplace or

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related to it. Hitting, shoving, pushing, kicking, and sexual assault are physical forms of workplace violence. Such abuse can also include holding or impeding a person, and touching or other inappropriate contact.

Verbal use of intimidation or harassment can be anything designed to ruin or discredit a person by making statements that are untrue, malicious, derogatory, rude, disrespectful, abusive, or obnoxious.

## Triggers

There are a number of situations that can trigger workplace violence. Among them are an unstable economy, layoffs or employment terminations, and psychological instability on the part of the worker.

## Risks

The risks associated with workplace violence increase when people work alone or in small groups such as at convenience stores. People involved in exchanging money with the public, or at places requiring late night or early morning employment are at a greater danger of becoming victims.

Workplace violence is not restricted to employee-employee interaction but also can include customer-employee aggression. The customer may be dissatisfied with the service or a product they have purchased, may loathe a delay in receiving service, and may assert that mistakes were made or promises were not kept. The employee is often not the person at fault but simply the first

individual the customer comes in contact with - the entity to vent any frustration to. The axiom, "the customer is always right" is not necessarily true for every occasion.

Threats might also be expected from criminals, paramilitary forces, terrorists, and protestors.

## Signs

There can be many signs of violence directed to another individual or group and they may come in many different forms.

Direct threats are those that are overtly made to an individual/group, either in person or through some medium such as electronic mail, letters, or telephone calls. "If you don't do this or that I am going to hurt you." Such intimidation can be made solely to the victim or in the presence of other persons. Regardless of how they are conveyed, this type of bullying is obvious and observable.

Another less obvious form of coercion is the veiled threat. "You know what happens to people who don't listen to me?" The threat is open-ended but nonetheless just as scary.

The conditional threat occurs when a restriction is placed on the situation. "If you do this, I will forget about that other problem." The victim is held at bay by blackmail or other fear factor.

Covert threats are those that are received without knowledge of who the perpetrator is or might be. This type of threat can come in the form of stalking, telephonic

harassment, or other similar means.

## Know the Signs

Those prone to violent behavior do not always stand out in the crowd. They may exhibit any number of habits or actions that can be indicative of violent behavior. These include a tendency toward being:

- Argumentative
- Uncooperative
- Unable to cope with authority
- Blameless
- Blameful
- Moody and unpredictable
- Depressed
- Excessive in the use of alcohol/drugs
- Violent in other activities

## Mitigation

Over half of all cases of workplace violence go unreported to the police. The first step in mitigation is to report all instances, no matter how small or insignificant they might seem at the time. If anyone is being threatened he/she should:

- Report any and all such occurrences immediately.
- Save all threatening letters, e-mails, voice mails, or other correspondence.
- Obtain a restraining order that includes the workplace and keep a copy on hand.
- Provide a picture of the perpetrator to the authorities (if available).
- Ask security for escort to or from the place of work, parking lot, bus stop, etc.

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- Learn and understand the company's workplace violence policies and obligations.
- Never wait until it is too late to take action.

The employer must:

- Devise and implement a comprehensive plan to deal with violence in the workplace and ensure all employees know about it.
- Take all reports seriously and investigate each on its own merits.
- Assist the employee in seeking professional intervention measures such as court orders, police action, etc.
- Accommodate changes for the employee that help safeguard his/her well being such as closer parking, relocating office or work station, providing security guard escort, etc.
- Assist the authorities by provided access to appropriate files and documentation.
- Ask the victim what changes can be made to make him/her feel safer.
- Never let a reported incident go without investigation and action.

## The Costs

Millions are spent each year on prevention, training and re-training, security, healthcare, lost work time, and legal expenditures. Aside from the obvious, workplace violence includes a variety of hidden expenses. The less obvious costs may even be more expensive, and include: lost

jobs, less productivity, fear, morale and psychological problems.

No one wants to go to work in an environment that includes violence and intimidation. Clearly, not all workplace violence can be eliminated or prevented. However, with proper planning and effort, workplace violence occurrences can be significantly reduced.  
*gwh/03*



## Starting the 'Fire' Under an Unmotivated Employee

*By Janette Iachini*

We never outgrow the notion of wanting recognition for doing good things. The incentive/reward may be different but the intent is still there.

An employer of any size is always seeking a way to reduce the costs associated with absenteeism, injuries, worker's compensation claims, insurance claims, and/or poor morale. With our aging workforce and the natural risks associated with aging, time and efforts may seem fruitless. However, *Occupational Health & Safety* (November 2002) reports the World Health Organization identified for the first time 10 risk factors contributing to disease and death (World Health Report 2002-Preventing Risks, Promoting Healthy Life).

These *preventable* risk factors "account for about 40 percent of the 56 million deaths worldwide annually and one-third of global loss of healthy life years." Intervention on a governmental and industrial-led level would have major benefits.

Given this, the employer adopts a safety/wellness program. The appointed Safety Officer or Wellness Coordinator is challenged to design a program that attracts and motivates employees to embrace safe work ethics or take on a healthy lifestyle of exercising, eating right, and more. Ultimately, a safe and healthy workforce will reduce high absenteeism, injuries; high worker's comp claims, and high insurance claims and will increase morale.

However, the best-planned program initially attracts many employees, but once the novelty wears off, all you are left with are the "worried well" (those employees who routinely take care of themselves, have few days off, rarely get injured, or have no need for health care, except for preventive visits) and a few high-risk employees: the unmotivated employees, or, as I call them, the "frequent flyers" (those employees who routinely use as many days possible to take off work, are accident prone, and have not seen a physician for years).

Not all employees will participate because "it's good for them." They'll participate when they get the right answer for "What's in it for me?" Therefore, the next step to enticing more "frequent flyer" participation in safety/wellness activities is for the program coordinator to

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persuade the CEO to offer incentives for achievement of specific criteria. Incentives can range from cheap items like pens or pencils, to T-shirts and sweatshirts or cash. But, again, your incentive program attracts a few more employees, but the "worried well" control the majority.

Before you scratch your head too hard trying to figure out why your well-planned program does not attract and keep all employees, we need to understand human behavior--more specifically, hierarchy of need, readiness to change, motivation, and incentives.

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Need

Abraham Maslow, a psychologist and motivation theorist, identified five levels of need or motives to human behavior. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the strongest need--physiological needs, then safety needs, belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Usually, it is a requirement for each motivator to be satisfied before the higher need can be fulfilled; however, most practitioners agree these needs interconnect.

I have heard time and time again from people at the administrative level and from wellness personnel that employees *should* participate in wellness programs because "it's good for them" and "it is the best thing for them." In essence, this attitude is attracting employees who have already moved through Maslow's hierarchy of need and are striving to achieve esteem needs or self-actualization. These employees strive for being their best, rising to their

full potential, achieving inner peace and harmony. You are attracting the exact population that you already have--the "worried well." The population you have is one that wants to be its best in all facets of life and is actively doing something to achieve that.

This way of thinking leaves behind the employee who is striving to meet his/her basic physiological needs or safety needs. His or her motivation is not based on who or what he can become, but on putting food on the table or a roof over his head.

## Transtheoretical Model of Stages of Change

Combine Maslow's theory with the next theory for discussion--Transtheoretical Model of Stages of Change by James Prochaska. His Transtheoretical Model of Stages of Change identified six stages of behavior change: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination.

A *precontemplator* has no intention of changing an unhealthy habit, no matter what you say or do. Do you remember "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink"? This is basically the idea of this stage. You can use any tactic you want to convince the employee that quitting smoking or starting an exercise program is the best thing for him, but he is not going to change.

A *contemplator* intends to change within the next six months. Her awareness of the risks and benefits of an

unhealthy habit has heightened enough for a change to take place.

An employee in the *preparation* stage intends to take action within the next 30 days and has taken some behavioral steps in a positive direction.

The difference between the next two stages, *action* stage and *maintenance* stage, is that the overt behavior has been changed for less than six months for action and the overt behavior has been changed for more than six months for maintenance.

*Termination* means the overt behavior will never return, and there is complete confidence that relapse will not happen.

Prochaska's model identifies readiness to change. What motivates one person can be very different for another (Maslow's hierarchy of need). Understanding what will motivate the "at-risk" employee using the Transtheoretical Model can be difficult. A practitioner needs to use several different techniques of motivation to be successful. It is common for a person to move back and forth through the stages. This can take place for a long period of time until termination occurs.

Information by means of flyers, paycheck stuffers, self-guided learning tools, e-mails, home mailings, electronic board messages, and many more needs to be continual to affect a precontemplator and to reinforce the active decision of the employee in the preparation stage.

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## Motivation

B.F. Skinner, a behaviorist, concluded that everything we do and are is shaped by our experience of punishment and rewards. Today, incentives or rewards are used to affect the behavior of children. Psychologists and behaviorists advocate "catching" a child doing good behaviors and rewarding that behavior instead of correcting an unwanted behavior. By reinforcing a positive behavior, the child will repeat that good behavior.

Skinner also believed that rewarding parts of the wanted behavior would lead to the final wanted behavior.

As we get older, we never outgrow the notion of wanting recognition for doing good things. The incentive/reward may be different but the intent is still there. Frequency is also standard. This means, to have a wanted behavior repeated, the initial reward needs to be appropriate and at frequent intervals. Over time, frequency can decrease because the wanted behavior has become the norm.

## Letting the Theories Work for You

Maslow, Prochaska, and Skinner had theories pertinent to understanding human behavior. Understanding these theories will help you with implementing an effective employee program that will focus on decreasing health care costs, worker's compensation claims, and absenteeism costs.

Most safety/wellness programs offer incentives or rewards for meeting specific goals. Many times, however, incentives are given one time per year, and it takes an employee several months to an entire year to achieve the required measures. This kind of timeframe can and does lead to injury hiding, cramming to get points at the last minute, or "fudging" the truth just to get the reward. The goal is too far out of reach. Which behavior has changed? The purpose of a safety/wellness program is to elicit positive long-term behavior change not short-term.

From what you have learned to this point about human behavior, does a reward given once a year change unwanted ("at-risk") behaviors to wanted behaviors? Absolutely not! OK, you might have a few, but you do not have enough to justify your efforts.

Maslow says everyone is motivated by different needs. Prochaska says everyone is at different readiness levels. And, Skinner says rewarding parts of the whole will get you the behavior you want. Tell me, does rewarding one time a year fit into these notions of behavior change? You end up rewarding those who already behave the way you want because it is not a problem for the "worried well" to meet the year-long goals. Rewarding once per year is not changing the behaviors of "high-risk" employees.

Some administrators consider incentives to be bribery. Adult employees are still human and behavior is a lifelong process, so change can occur at any time. Remember, behavior change

does not stop once you've reached a certain age. At the work site, behavior is changed with frequent recognition and with positive reinforcement.

To change an employee's risky behavior to a safe or well one, rewards need to be frequent and at all levels of readiness. They need to be given for the slightest hint of a wanted behavior and to an exceeded behavior. They don't need to be extravagant, but the significance needs to match the behavior and the employee's wants.

*Reprinted from Occupational Health & Safety (March 2003).*

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## Things to Know About Presentations

### Building the Presentation

- ◆ Use standardized templates – preferably simple ones.
- ◆ Decide in advance whether the slides are for simplification or elaboration.
- ◆ Don't be embarrassed by content-filled slides (without big-time multimedia).
- ◆ Build slides that can be reused. Concentrate the perishable information on a few revisable slides.
- ◆ Use light backgrounds and dark type in a dark room and dark backgrounds with light type for light rooms. Contrast is the key.
- ◆ Colors elicit responses:
  - **Red** backgrounds heighten emotions but can also mean financial deficit.
  - **Blue** is used as a background for a more conservative approach.
  - **Green** backgrounds will stimulate interaction from the audience.
  - **Black** is used to show some finality – things that cannot change such as “being in the black” financially.
  - Avoid **red** and **green** or **white** and **yellow** together because of the lack of contrast.

- Never use **vibrant** colors – they distract from the presentation.
- When possible, limit colors to two or three.
- Tailor the color to the crowd, but remember some colors are offensive in certain cultures!
- Ban all fonts lower than **24**

point.

- ◆ Use simple or sans serif typefaces.
- ◆ For emphasis, use the **bold** feature and avoid underlining.
- ◆ Use of UPPERCASE or *italicized* letters for large amounts of type is difficult to read.
- ◆ The “Spelling and Grammar” feature under “Options” in “Tools” needs to be modified to ensure recognition of words in UPPERCASE.
- ◆ Attempt to limit the slide to six words across and six lines deep – the “6 by 6” rule.
- ◆ Clipart, photography, sound, and animation should be limited in use for simplicity – used only if necessary. Note: For Department of Defense purposes, clipart is out and actual photographs are in.
- ◆ Do not place words over graphics.
- ◆ Graphs can be very useful in presenting financial or trend-type

information. Types of graphs to use include:

- Bar graph – used to show the relationship between variables during a specific time period.
- Pictograph – icons, rather than columns, used in bar graphs.
- Line graph – shows the change of one or more variable over time.
- Pie chart – shows the segmented components of a 360-degree whole. Must add up to 100 percent.
- ◆ Once your production is complete, save it as a Portable Document Format (pdf) file if you have that capability. Your presentation will be unchangeable, but it will be much smaller in file size.
- ◆ Distribute printed copies of the presentation as handouts for note taking, but remember to print in “black and white” and not “grayscale.”

### Giving the Presentation

- ◆ Keep the lights on, and use a powerful projector.
- ◆ Use no more than three slides per minute.
- ◆ Introduce yourself even if everyone knows you.
- ◆ Speak loud enough for the audience to hear and vary your speaking volume for emphasis.

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- ◆ Give a short description of your objective – tell them what is coming.
- ◆ Make your message clear and concise. Simply tell them what is – what you want them to remember.
- ◆ Summarize your presentation before closing – tell them what has been said.
- ◆ Other things to consider:
- ◆ Repetition reemphasizes key points.
- ◆ Use quotes, but only short ones that are easy to remember.
- ◆ Surprise the audience to draw attention to the topic, but be careful how you do it.
- ◆ Telling stories or judicious use of humor will heighten the experience for the audience and make it more positive. However, consider the audience and the culture. Never use off-color jokes or statements in your presentation.
- ◆ Avoid turning your back to the audience.
- ◆ Do not keep your hands in your pockets or hidden from the crowd.
- ◆ Maintain eye contact and be confident – know your subject. Do not read each slide out loud.
- ◆ Add body language and facial expressions, but never show anger or indignation.
- ◆ And most of all - keep it simple!

*Compiled from various sources.*

## Worth A Closer Look

Occupational Health and Safety  
Online

[www.ohsonline.com](http://www.ohsonline.com)

OSHA Safety and Health Topics:  
Workplace Violence

[www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence](http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence)

Bureau of Justice (BOJ)  
Statistics: Violence and Theft in  
the Workplace

[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/hefwork.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/hefwork.htm)

OPM: Work/Life Programs –  
Workplace Violence

[www.opm.gov/ehs/violence.asp](http://www.opm.gov/ehs/violence.asp)

NIOSH: Violence (Occupational)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/violence.html>

USDA Handbook on Workplace  
Violence Prevention and  
Response

[www.usda.gov/news/pubs/violence/wpv.htm](http://www.usda.gov/news/pubs/violence/wpv.htm)

Workplace Violence  
Headquarters

[www.workplace-violence-hq.com](http://www.workplace-violence-hq.com)

The National Institute for the  
Prevention of Workplace  
Violence

[www.workplaceviolence911.com](http://www.workplaceviolence911.com)

Accolade – Intelligent Bookfinder  
[www.growing.com/accolade/violence\\_place.htm](http://www.growing.com/accolade/violence_place.htm)

## A Parting Thought

"He that knows not and knows that he knows not is a child, teach him. He that knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool, shun him. He that knows and knows not that he knows is asleep, wake him. He that knows and knows that he knows is a teacher, follow him." - Persian Proverb



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**Thanks!**